

## GIVING UK UTILITY CUSTOMERS A VOICE



How do household utility bill payers really feel about the massive changes happening in the UK energy and water sectors? What's their reaction to the prospect of significantly higher energy bills this year?

Where do they feel most let down by their utility providers? What would encourage them to be more loyal? And how is the rapid adoption of digital technologies during the pandemic changing the way bill payers want to interact with their utility suppliers?

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## WHAT BILL PAYERS TOLD US

This report documents the findings of two surveys of over 1,000 domestic utility bill payers in the UK who were questioned in early 2022. Here's a summary of what they said.



### On embracing digital communications and self-service:

61 per cent reveal that they have become more used to interacting digitally with companies since the pandemic. And 72 per cent now want utility companies to provide online resources that make it easy to resolve their questions themselves. In fact, 60 per cent would prefer not to call customer services at all if they can solve their issues using online resources.



### On billing accuracy:

62 per cent said they regularly check their energy and water bills for mistakes (rising to 73 per cent after the energy price cap rise was announced), suggesting customers have doubts about billing accuracy.



### On improving customer service:

Bill payers are very demanding in their customer service expectations in a variety of areas. Over 90 per cent expect utility suppliers to provide clear, timely communications about service interruptions, make tariffs easy to understand and meter readings easier to submit and to respond to queries quickly, without the customer having to follow up the same issue multiple times. And 57 per cent of bill payers in the survey expect higher levels of service in return for higher prices.



### On higher bills and supporting vulnerable customers:

80 per cent said they are very concerned about how higher energy bills announced in the new price cap will impact their household finances this year. And with an expected harsher economic climate, 90 per cent stressed the importance of energy and water companies supporting people who have difficulties paying their bills.



### On protecting the environment:

70 per cent feel it is important that energy and water providers are helping to protect the environment and reducing their carbon footprint – and 37 per cent are willing to pay a little more to support these initiatives.

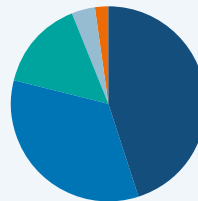
## UTILITY CUSTOMER SENTIMENT ON FIVE KEY ISSUES

We asked customers to tell us what they think about five key areas: rising energy prices; customer loyalty and attitudes to switching; how people want to interact with their utility suppliers; the importance of billing; and the environmental policies of energy and water companies. We asked how they felt about energy prices after Ofgem's announcement of the latest rise to the price cap on 3rd February 2022.

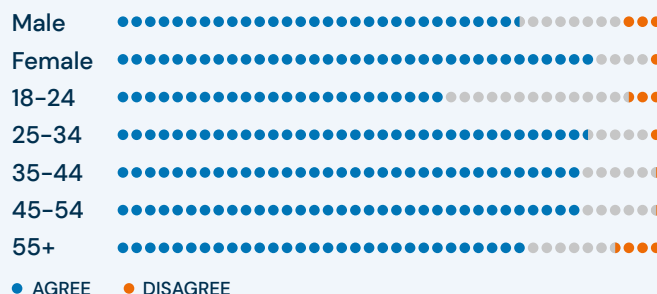
### CUSTOMERS FEARFUL OF RISING ENERGY PRICES

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?  
*After the price cap announcement*

I am very concerned about the impact that rising home energy bills will have on my household finances this year



45% Strongly agree  
35% Somewhat agree  
15% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
3% Somewhat disagree  
2% Strongly disagree



86%  
FEMALE

86%  
25-44s

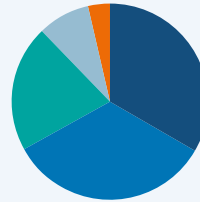
84%  
45-54s



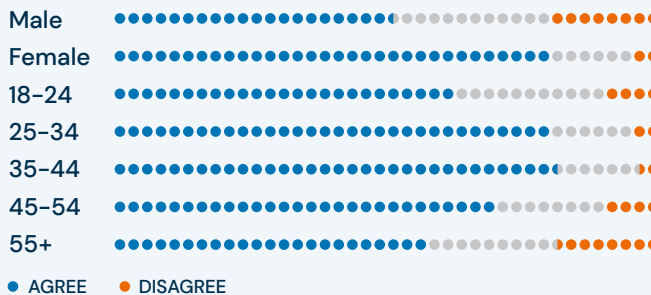
In total 80% Agree

2

I will have to cut spending on other household essentials (e.g., buy less food, new clothes) in order to pay the higher home energy bills that are expected this year



**33%** Strongly agree  
**34%** Somewhat agree  
**21%** Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
**9%** Somewhat disagree  
**3%** Strongly disagree



**82%**  
35-44s

**80%**  
FEMALE

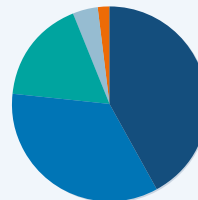
**80%**  
25-34s



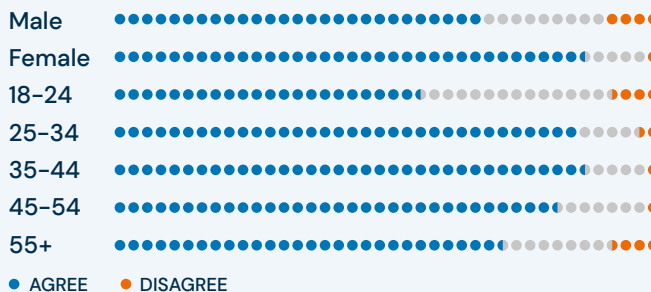
**In total 67% Agree**

3

With home energy bills set to go up this year I/my household will try to use less gas and electricity (e.g., by wearing more layers, turning down thermostat on heating, having fewer baths and showers)



**42%** Strongly agree  
**35%** Somewhat agree  
**17%** Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
**4%** Somewhat disagree  
**2%** Strongly disagree



**84%**  
25-34s

**86%**  
FEMALE  
& 35-44s

**81%**  
45-54s



**In total 77% Agree**

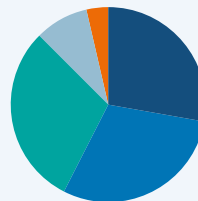
Both before and after Ofgem's price cap announcement, a large majority (80 per cent) of bill payers we surveyed said they are very concerned about the impact higher bills will have on household finances this year. The message is broadly the same across all parts of the country and all age groups.

Two thirds (67 per cent) expect to cut spending on other household essentials such as food and clothes in order to pay higher energy bills. More than three quarters will try to find ways to cut down their gas and electricity usage – including taking fewer baths and showers. Overall, female bill payers appear more concerned about price rises; 80 per cent said they will cut spending on other household essentials and 86 per cent will try to cut down on energy usage. Younger age groups are also worse affected: around 80 per cent of 25–44 year olds expect to cut other household spending, while around 86 per cent will use less gas and electricity.

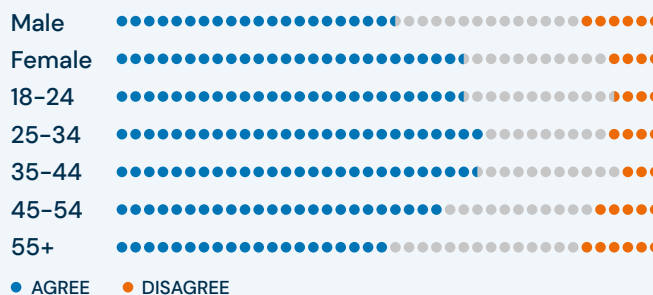
## ENERGY CUSTOMERS BECOMING LESS LOYAL AND MORE OPEN TO SWITCHING

Following the recent announcement that home energy bills are set to go up significantly to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

I will expect higher levels of service from my energy supplier in return



28% Strongly agree  
 30% Somewhat agree  
 30% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 9% Somewhat disagree  
 3% Strongly disagree



67%  
25–34s

67%  
35–44s

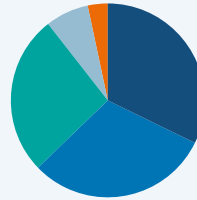
63%  
FEMALE &  
18–24s



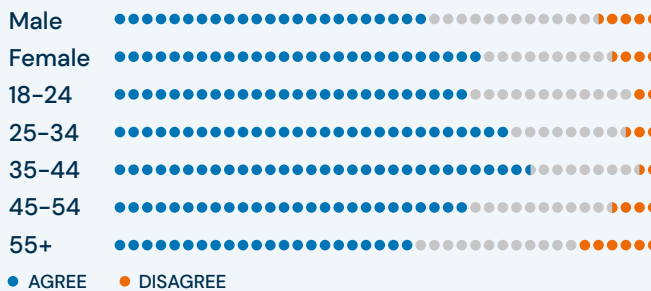
In total 58% Agree

5

I am more likely to look around for better energy deals and discounts from now on



32% Strongly agree  
 31% Somewhat agree  
 27% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 7% Somewhat disagree  
 3% Strongly disagree



72%

25-34s

77%

35-44s

68%

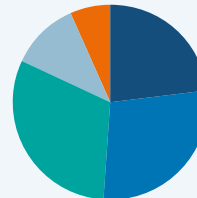
FEMALE



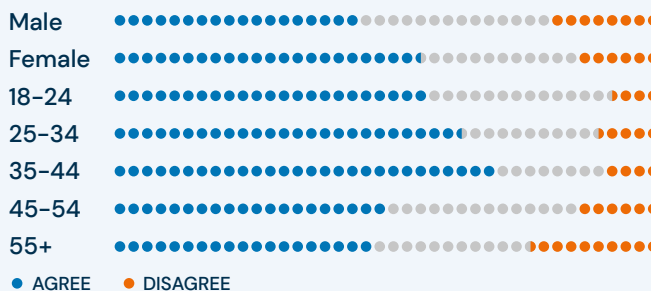
In total 63% Agree

6

I plan to switch energy supplier to reduce costs as soon as a better deal is available



23% Strongly agree  
 28% Somewhat agree  
 31% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 11% Somewhat disagree  
 7% Strongly disagree



67%

18-24s

70%

35-44s

64%

25-34s



In total 51% Agree

The higher energy price cap is likely to make customers more demanding and less loyal. 58 per cent of people we asked will expect higher levels of service in return for higher bills – and around two thirds (63 per cent) will be more inclined to search for better deals elsewhere from now on. In fact, around half of all customers intend to switch supplier to reduce their costs as soon as a better deal is available.



People in the 25–44 age bracket are the most motivated. They want higher levels of service, better deals and are the most likely to switch as soon as they can – perhaps unsurprisingly as this age group appears worst affected by the price rises (see previous section).

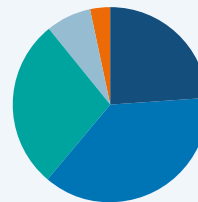
## CUSTOMERS EMBRACING DIGITAL SELF-SERVICE

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

7



Since the pandemic I have become more used to interacting with companies digitally on their websites, apps, and other online channels



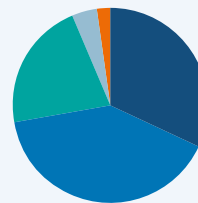
24% Strongly agree  
 37% Somewhat agree  
 28% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 8% Somewhat disagree  
 3% Strongly disagree

In total 61% Agree

8



I want utility companies to provide online resources that make it easy for me to find information and resolve my questions myself rather than forcing me to call them



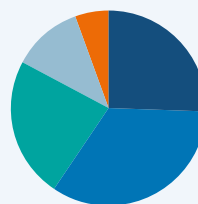
32% Strongly agree  
 40% Somewhat agree  
 22% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 4% Somewhat disagree  
 2% Strongly disagree

In total 72% Agree

9



I prefer not to call a live customer service person if I can solve my issues myself using online resources



26% Strongly agree  
 34% Somewhat agree  
 23% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 12% Somewhat disagree  
 5% Strongly disagree

In total 60% Agree



Customers are becoming increasingly open to digital interaction, including self-service technologies – a trend intensified by COVID-19 lockdowns. 61 per cent of bill payers told us that they have become more used to interacting digitally since the pandemic (and many are actively looking to do this, as we reveal in the next section).

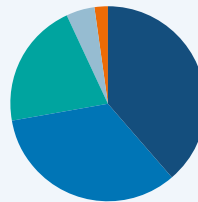
The majority (72 per cent) now want utility companies to provide online resources that make it easy to find information and resolve their questions themselves. In fact, 60 per cent would prefer not to call customer services at all if they can solve issues themselves using online resources.

As self-service is less expensive than live interaction with call centre agents this trend presents an opportunity for companies to reduce costs as well as improving the customer experience. Utilities should think as broadly as possible about self-service and consider how it could be expanded, for example by allowing customers to chart and analyse their own usage, send and receive a broader range of correspondence digitally, and interact in a more connected way across all channels.

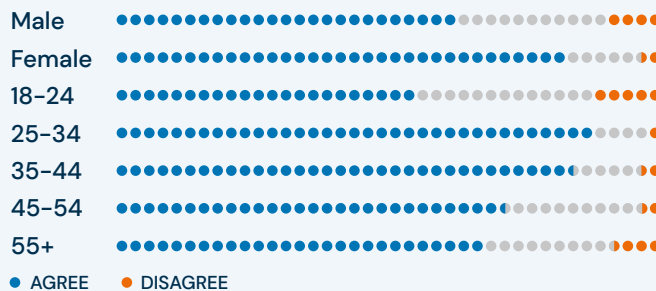
## CUSTOMERS FAVOUR DIGITAL BILLING

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

I am now more likely to regularly check my energy bills for billing mistakes



39% Strongly agree  
 34% Somewhat agree  
 21% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 4% Somewhat disagree  
 2% Strongly disagree



84%  
35-44s

87%  
25-34s

83%  
FEMALE

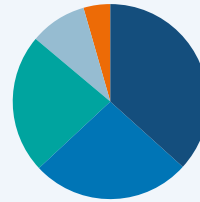


In total 73% Agree

11



I think it's more convenient to view all my household bills online rather than on paper



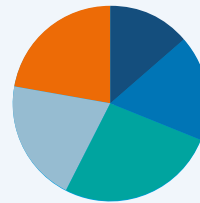
37% Strongly agree  
 27% Somewhat agree  
 23% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 9% Somewhat disagree  
 4% Strongly disagree

In total 64% Agree

12



I prefer to receive my bills on paper



14% Strongly agree  
 17% Somewhat agree  
 27% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
 20% Somewhat disagree  
 22% Strongly disagree

In total 31% Agree



**73%**  
 of bill payers  
 say they are  
 now more likely  
 to regularly  
 check their bills  
 for mistakes



With inflationary pressure on all household expenses this year, it's not surprising that customers are spending time checking their bills. It is becoming even more important for utilities to provide accurate, timely billing – and to make monitoring bills quick and easy for customers.

Nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of bill payers we asked say they are now more likely to regularly check their energy and water bills for mistakes. The numbers jump higher still with 87 per cent of 25–34s, 84 per cent of 35–44s and 83 per cent of females now more inclined to check their bills.

Close to two thirds of bill payers say it's more convenient to view all their household bills online rather than on paper. This opinion is consistent across all age groups, from younger digital natives to the over 55s. However, ditching paper altogether is not yet an option for suppliers since nearly a third (31 per cent) of respondents still prefer paper bills.

To meet growing demand for electronic billing, utility companies should consider how to enhance their digital services, for example by supporting a greater range of delivery channels, and creating new billing formats to suit different channels. With people's increasing appetite to do more digitally, utilities have the opportunity to differentiate by turning traditional static bills into a more interactive communication, and providing digital tools to help customers better understand their charges, manage their usage and budget for the future.

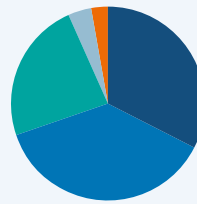
## CUSTOMERS VALUE ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES, AND SOME WILL PAY MORE FOR THEM

## To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

13



It's important that my energy or water company is helping to protect the environment/reducing its carbon footprint

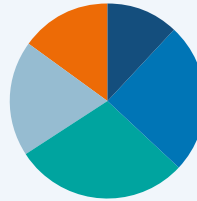


33% Strongly agree  
37% Somewhat agree  
23% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
4% Somewhat disagree  
3% Strongly disagree

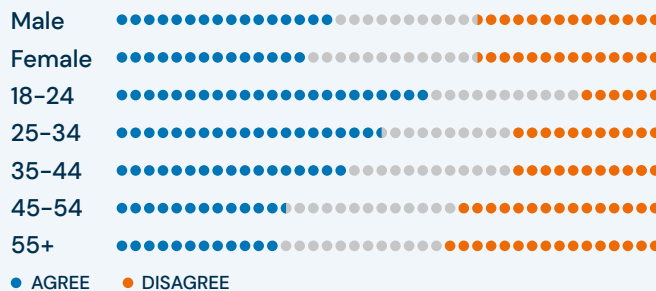
In total 70% Agree

14

I would be willing to pay a little more on my home energy and water bills if I knew that my suppliers were investing this money in becoming more environmentally friendly/reducing their carbon footprint



12% Strongly agree  
25% Somewhat agree  
29% Neither agree nor disagree/not applicable  
19% Somewhat disagree  
15% Strongly disagree



57%

18-24s

49%

25-34s

43%

35-44s



In total 37% Agree

Environmental issues are now ever-present in many people's minds and 70 per cent of customers we asked said it is important that their energy or water provider is helping to protect the environment/reducing its carbon footprint. Over a third (37 per cent) are willing to pay a little more on their bills for suppliers to invest in becoming more environmentally friendly. This jumps to 57 per cent among the 18-24 age group.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT IN A UTILITY SUPPLIER?

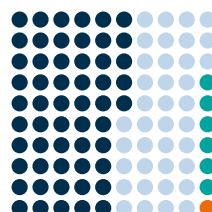
We asked a range of questions to get under the skin of the factors that customers value in a utility supplier (other than price and uninterrupted service). The responses reveal why keeping customers happy is so challenging in this sector. Everything we asked them about – from timely communications about service interruptions and adoption of digital customer communication channels, to helping vulnerable customers with paying their bills – was considered important by more than 80 per cent of respondents. And answers varied little by age or geographical location of the bill payer.

### GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

Other than price and uninterrupted service, to what extent do you feel the following are important in a utility (energy or water) supplier?

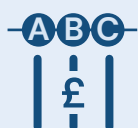


They provide clear, timely communications about service interruptions, faults, maintenance etc that might affect my household

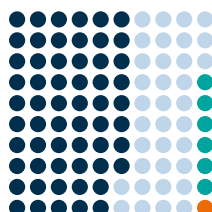


55%	Very important
38%	Somewhat important
6%	Not particularly important
1%	Not at all important

93% Important



They make it really easy to understand tariffs and tariff choices



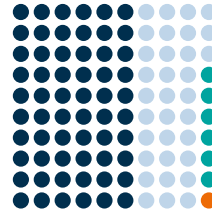
58%	Very important
35%	Somewhat important
6%	Not particularly important
1%	Not at all important

93% Important





I don't have to chase up the same issue multiple times

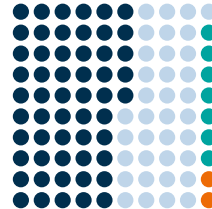


60% Very important  
33% Somewhat important  
6% Not particularly important  
1% Not at all important

93% Important

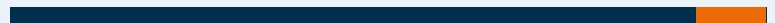


They make it easy to submit meter readings

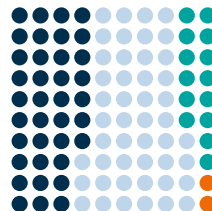


55% Very important  
36% Somewhat important  
7% Not particularly important  
2% Not at all important

91% Important



They provide timely reminders about bills



37% Very important  
47% Somewhat important  
14% Not particularly important  
2% Not at all important

84% Important



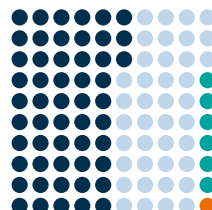
These results show wide agreement about many of the key ingredients that can make the utility customer's experience easy and frictionless. Clear, timely communications about service interruptions, faults and maintenance; ease of submitting meter readings; and having tariffs that are really easy to understand are all issues that are considered important or very important by over 90 per cent of the bill payers we asked. Similarly, 93 per cent value not having to repeatedly contact the supplier about the same issue multiple times.

## MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS AND ONLINE SELF-SERVICE

Other than price and uninterrupted service, to what extent do you feel the following are important in a utility (energy or water) supplier?



They allow me to contact them in the way I prefer (e.g., by phone, email, social media, text, messaging)

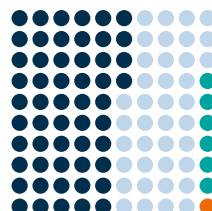


53%	Very important
40%	Somewhat important
6%	Not particularly important
1%	Not at all important

**93%** Important



They respond to my questions/ queries quickly whether I contact them on a digital channel (e.g., text, messaging, social media, email) or if I call to speak to them

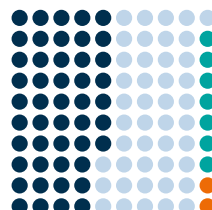


54%	Very important
39%	Somewhat important
6%	Not particularly important
1%	Not at all important

**93%** Important



They provide good online resources and information that help me resolve any simple issues or queries myself without having to contact them



47%	Very important
44%	Somewhat important
7%	Not particularly important
2%	Not at all important

**91%** Important



They allow me to receive my bills and correspondence in whatever way I choose – by post or electronically



48%	Very important
42%	Somewhat important
9%	Not particularly important
1%	Not at all important

**90%** Important



Offering a joined-up customer service operation with a variety of customer contact channels and effective self-service technology is essential. 93 per cent of bill payers in the survey feel it's important that they are able to contact a company using their preferred communications channel – whether that's by phone or digital channels. 90 per cent want to be able to choose to receive bills and correspondence by post or electronically. And 93 per cent expect a quick response whether they call or make contact digitally, while 91 per cent value good online resources that allow them to resolve simple issues themselves.

## ASSISTANCE FOR VULNERABLE CUSTOMERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

**Other than price and uninterrupted service, to what extent do you feel the following are important in a utility (energy or water) supplier?**

They provide support for people who find it hard to pay their bills

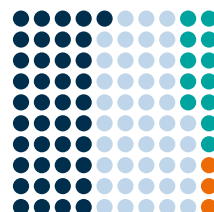


52%	Very important
38%	Somewhat important
9%	Not particularly important
1%	Not at all important

**90%** Important



They are actively working to reduce the impact of their activities on the environment



41%	Very important
44%	Somewhat important
12%	Not particularly important
3%	Not at all important

**85%** Important



It is evident that social and environmental responsibility is important to customers, with the majority expecting utilities to reduce the environmental impact of their activities and help vulnerable people pay their bills.





## HOW DO CONSUMERS WANT THEIR EXISTING UTILITY SUPPLIER TO IMPROVE?

Next, we questioned utility customers on the specific improvements they want from their existing providers. The majority (83 per cent of energy customers and 73 per cent of water customers) felt that there was at least one way their current supplier could change for the better.

### ENERGY CUSTOMERS



How can your current energy supplier improve its service to you, if at all? (Tick all that apply)

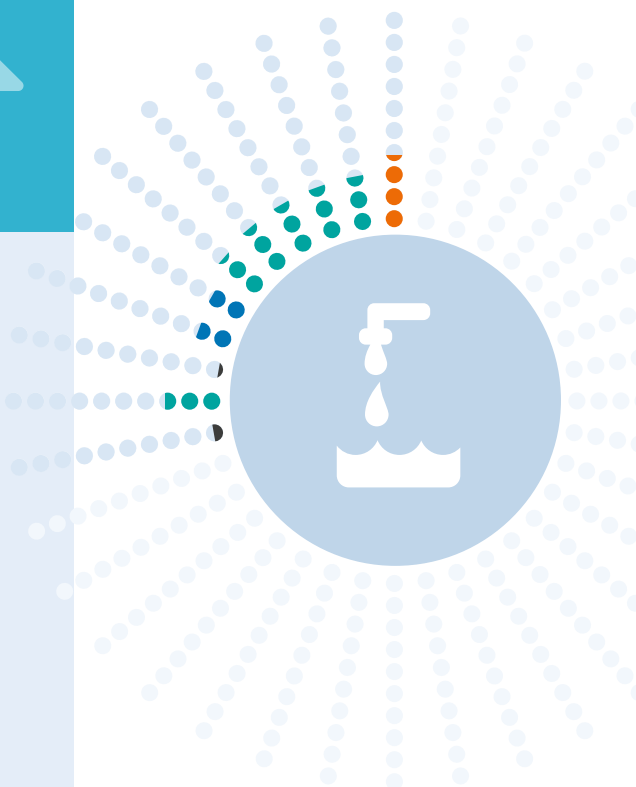


- 42%** Make sure my bills are accurate
- 33%** Let me contact them the way I prefer, including phoning to speak with them or using online channels (such as email, messaging, social media)
- 31%** Make my bills easier to understand
- 31%** Ensure that staff have all my details to hand when I call them (including bills, account information, letters, customer service issues)
- 31%** Answer my calls faster
- 29%** Provide guidance on helping me save energy to reduce my bills
- 27%** Make it easier for me to pay less during the summer when my household uses less energy
- 26%** Allow me to receive my bills and correspondence in whatever way I choose – by post or electronically
- 25%** Provide a smart meter
- 25%** Resolve my complaints faster
- 22%** Provide financial support to help me pay my bills
- 16%** N/A – There is no way my current energy supplier can improve its service to me
- 2%** Other, please specify

## WATER CUSTOMERS



**How can your current water supplier improve its service to you, if at all? (Tick all that apply)**



- 33%** Make sure my bills are accurate
- 26%** Make my bills easier to understand
- 26%** Let me contact them the way I prefer, including phoning to speak with them or using online channels (such as email, messaging, social media)
- 26%** Ensure that staff have all my details to hand when I call them (including bills, account information, letters, customer service issues)
- 24%** Allow me to receive my bills and correspondence in whatever way I choose – by post or electronically
- 23%** Answer my calls faster
- 19%** Resolve my complaints faster
- 19%** Provide financial support to help me pay my bills
- 2%** Other, please specify
- 27%** N/A – There is no way my current water supplier can improve its service to me
- 6%** N/A – I do not have a current water supplier



**42%** of energy customers and around a third of water customers we questioned appear to be unsure if their bills are accurate

## BILLING ACCURACY

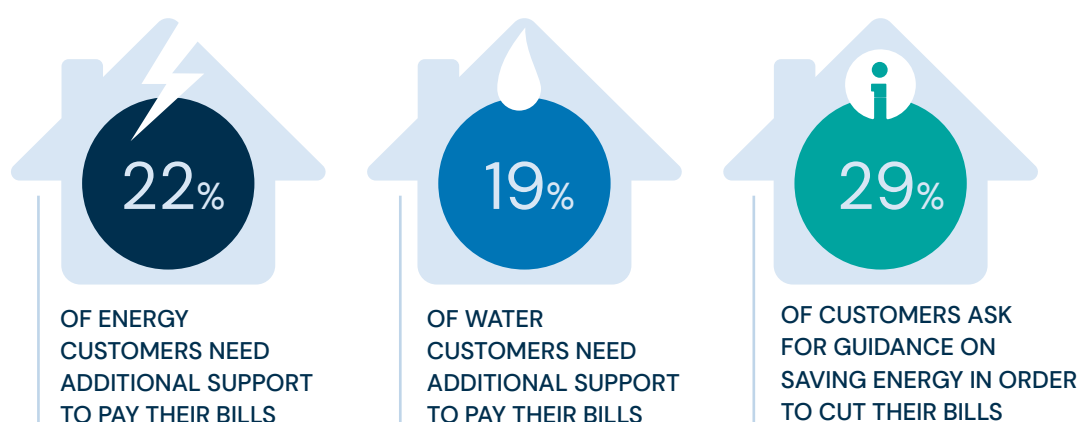
Clarity and accuracy of billing should be a given in a regulated industry, but the responses suggest that these are areas of concern for many customers. 42 per cent of energy customers and a third of water customers we questioned appear to be unsure if their bills are accurate. And 31 per cent of energy customers and 26 per cent of water customers want their bills to be easier to understand. One in four respondents (25 per cent) also want their supplier to install a smart meter.

As demonstrated earlier in the report, customers want to check that their bills are accurate. One way that suppliers can offer reassurance and clarity is to provide detailed historical information together with basic analysis facilities so that customers can compare billing and usage rates over time and rule out any anomalies for themselves.



## FINANCIAL SUPPORT WITH PAYING BILLS

Given the rising cost of living, it is very likely that more people will need additional support to pay their bills this year. Unsurprisingly, given the continuing crisis in energy, slightly more energy customers (22 per cent) want supplier help in this area than water customers (19 per cent). And 29 per cent are asking for guidance from their energy suppliers on saving energy in order to cut bills.



## EASE OF CONTACT AND COMPLAINT HANDLING

Complaint handling is always a thorny issue and the top line here is that a quarter of energy customers and nearly one in five water customers we asked are unhappy with how quickly complaints are being resolved by their suppliers.

There may be good practical or technical reasons why some complaints cannot be resolved immediately. However, the responses indicate that companies could do more to reduce the wider frustrations around customer communications and complaint handling. Around a third of energy customers and a quarter of water customers want suppliers to make it easier to use whatever channel they prefer and for staff to be given access to relevant customer information when taking calls.

Providing better, more integrated support for multiple channels can reduce the overall number of queries as customers feel more confident about resolving simple issues through self-service, freeing up staff time to handle more complex issues. And giving frontline staff the tools to swiftly summon up customer information reduces delays and the number of call backs.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

One thing is clear, in the light of the unprecedented events engulfing the sector, utility companies must work hard to stand out from the crowd in the current market. With limited opportunities to compete on price, improving the customer experience will be the primary differentiator and customers will expect their suppliers to step up to the mark.

Customers now expect all companies to provide digital capabilities and an excellent experience as standard. And this is echoed by the results of our survey throughout this report. Customers want interactions with their supplier to be straightforward: they want communications that are easy to understand; online resources to enable self-service; and a choice of ways to get in touch, while also knowing that queries will be dealt with quickly. Suppliers must work at extending their digital services and support a range of digital channels and formats to keep customers happy, while also providing frontline staff with immediate access to up-to-date customer information.

At the same time, higher energy prices mean customers will be less forgiving of mistakes and delays. They will demand better service in return, otherwise they will go elsewhere. Looking across the energy and water industry, customers expect suppliers to demonstrate social responsibility: offering financial help to those who are struggling, and doing more to protect the environment.

## ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Macro 4, a division of UNICOM® Global, commissioned two online surveys of 1,193 and 1,312 domestic utility bill payers (aged 18+) throughout the UK via research company Censuswide.

The surveys were conducted in January and February 2022.

## About Macro 4

Macro 4 develops software solutions that accelerate digital transformation. We help organisations to deliver engaging multi-channel experiences, personalise customer communications and drive greater value from their corporate content.

### OUR SOLUTIONS INCLUDE:

- **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND MODERNISATION**  
Augmenting enterprise systems with new technology
- **ENTERPRISE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**  
Improving information access and removing departmental silos
- **CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT**  
Orchestrating and personalising interactions across all customer touch points
- **INFORMATION GOVERNANCE**  
Enabling data protection and regulatory compliance
- **CUSTOMER AND EMPLOYEE SELF-SERVICE**  
Delivering customisable out-of-the-box web portals

Our solutions help utility companies increase customer satisfaction and loyalty while delivering efficiencies and cost savings in a variety of ways including increasing productivity, resolving queries and disputes faster and reducing print and postage costs. Learn how we have worked with [E.ON](#), [Severn Trent Water](#) and [Cadent](#).